



FROM WORK PRESSURE TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: GENERATION Z CONFLICT, INSECURITY, AND STRESS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of work-related stress as a catalyst for Generation Z's career transition towards entrepreneurship. Amidst the dominance of the informal sector and rising underemployment, poor job quality has led to workplace conflicts, job insecurity and work-related stress becoming increasingly common experiences among young workers. Unlike previous studies that emphasised the negative impacts of work-related stress, this research explores its transformational dimensions in driving alternative career choices. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, this study delves into the subjective experiences of Generation Z through in-depth interviews analysed thematically. The findings indicate that work pressure develops in stages, progressing from workplace conflict and job insecurity to cumulative work-related stress. These conditions trigger career reflection as a turning point that drives individuals out of formal employment. Key findings suggest that entrepreneurship is not solely driven by opportunities (pull factors), but also by work-related stress as a powerful push factor. Thus, work-related stress is not merely destructive but functions as a catalyst for career transformation. This study offers a novel contribution through an integrative model linking work-related stress and entrepreneurship, whilst affirming the role of work-related stress in the emergence of new entrepreneurs among Generation Z.

Keywords: *Work Pressure, Job Insecurity, Work Stress, Entrepreneurship, Generation Z*

A. INTRODUCTION

Changes in the structure and dynamics of the global workforce have had significant implications for the behavior and preferences of workers, particularly Generation Z, who are now beginning to dominate the job market. This generation exhibits distinct characteristics compared to previous generations, such as an orientation toward work flexibility, work-life balance, and the search for meaning in work (Agarwal & Vaghela, 2018; Twenge et al., 2010; Vieira et al., 2024). However, the reality of today's workforce often does not align with these expectations, marked by increasing work pressure, role conflict, and job uncertainty faced by young workers.

The employment phenomenon demonstrates a dynamic characterized not only by an increase in the workforce but also by issues of job quality and stability. Data from the National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) for August 2025 recorded a workforce of 3.08 million people, an increase of 68,960 people compared to August 2024, with the Labor Force Participation Rate (TPAK) also increasing by 0.46 percentage points. The number of employed people was recorded at 2.93 million, an increase of 66.91 thousand, with the largest growth occurring in the mining and quarrying sector, at 50.36 thousand. However,

the employment structure is still dominated by the informal sector, which accounts for 56.39 percent, indicating a high proportion of jobs with relatively low levels of protection and certainty. More specifically, the 0.14 percentage point increase in the percentage of underemployed and 1.72 percentage points in part-time workers indicates a trend toward increasing underemployment, potentially reinforcing perceptions of job insecurity. This situation occurs despite the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) being recorded at 4.82 percent, a 0.04 percentage point decrease compared to the previous year. This suggests that declining unemployment rates are not always accompanied by improvements in job quality. Therefore, the current employment phenomenon is not solely related to job availability but also to the stability, security, and quality of work perceived by individuals (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Aulia et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2023; Febriyanti et al., 2024).

In an organizational context, work stress stems not only from job uncertainty but also from work-life conflicts experienced by individuals, including role conflict and work-life conflict. Work-family conflict has been shown to reduce work-life balance and increase individual psychological distress (Allen et al., 2013; Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2021). Furthermore, an unsupportive work environment, low flexibility, and weak employee empowerment contribute to a declining quality of work life and increased job alienation (Sirgy et al., 2001; Grawitch et al., 2006; Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013; Erdem, 2014; García Contreras et al., 2022).

The accumulation of work conflicts and job insecurity often leads to increased work stress. Work stress is a psychological response to prolonged pressure, which can lead to anxiety, depression, burnout, and even decreased individual performance and well-being (Bhui et al., 2012; Harkness et al., 2005; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020). For Generation Z, this pressure is increasingly complex due to the influence of developments in digital technology and social media, which shape different interaction patterns and work expectations (Jaiswal & Vidani, 2024). Empirically, recent phenomena indicate a shift in Generation Z's response to work pressure. While work pressure is generally associated with turnover intention or decreased performance, new trends are emerging, such as quiet quitting and a shift in career orientation toward entrepreneurship (Axios & Generation Lab, 2023; Biregeyi et al., 2023). This suggests that work pressure not only has negative impacts but can also trigger changes in behavior and career choices.

Entrepreneurship has become an increasingly relevant alternative for Generation Z in the face of job uncertainty. Various studies have shown that self-efficacy, risk-taking, resilience, and the need for achievement are important factors in driving entrepreneurial interest (Mustofa & Ekawati, 2017; Permana, 2016; Korber & McNaughton, 2017; Yang & Danes, 2015). Furthermore, passion and the drive to create value independently are also important determinants in the development of entrepreneurial behavior (Merieska & Meiyanto, 2017; Saragih, 2017). In the context of job uncertainty, entrepreneurship can be viewed as an adaptive strategy for achieving economic independence (Ambarwati & Sobari, 2020; Ananda & Rafida, 2016).

However, empirical studies linking work conflict, job insecurity, and work stress as factors driving entrepreneurship are still limited. Most previous research has focused on the negative impacts of these variables, such as turnover intention, burnout, and decreased performance (Narotama & Sintaasih, 2022; Efrial & Satrya, 2023; Fan et al., 2023). On the other hand, entrepreneurship research tends to emphasize internal individual factors such as motivation, education, and self-efficacy, without linking them to work pressure as an external factor (Ambarriyah & Fachrurrozie, 2019; Cahya et al., 2021; Hidayati & Rosmita, 2022). The implication is that there is a clear research gap: the lack of integration between organizational behavior and entrepreneurship perspectives in explaining how work pressure, through work conflict, job insecurity, and job stress, can act as a push factor for Generation Z to become entrepreneurs. Furthermore, previous research tends to view work stress as a destructive variable, without exploring its transformational potential in driving innovation and economic independence. This research is highly urgent given the increasing job

insecurity and the high proportion of young workers vulnerable to psychological stress in the modern era. Without a comprehensive understanding, this phenomenon has the potential to lead to broader socioeconomic problems, such as increased underemployment and low job quality. Therefore, a new approach is needed that focuses not only on the negative impacts of work pressure but also on its potential to drive career transformation. The main novelty of this research lies in the development of an integrative model that links work conflict, job insecurity, and work stress as determinants in driving Generation Z towards entrepreneurship. This research offers a new perspective by positioning work stress not only as a source of problems, but also as a catalyst in the formation of new entrepreneurs. Thus, it is expected to enrich the literature in the field of organizational behavior and entrepreneurship and provide practical implications for the development of employment policies and entrepreneurship education

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. It aims to deeply understand Generation Z's subjective experiences in dealing with work pressures, including work conflict, job insecurity, and work stress, and how these experiences shape individuals' decisions to transition to entrepreneurship. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it can explore the meaning of individual life experiences comprehensively and contextually, thus providing a deeper understanding of the transformation process from worker to entrepreneur (Afrizal, 2019; Hafni, 2017).

The subjects in this study were Generation Z individuals who had work experience and had experienced work pressure, and who had a tendency or had already made the decision to transition to entrepreneurship. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which is a deliberate selection based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria include individuals within the Generation Z age range, having at least one year of work experience, having experienced work conflict, job insecurity, or work stress, and having experience or interest in entrepreneurship, either in the start-up stage or already running a business. The number of informants is determined flexibly based on the principle of data saturation, namely when the data obtained has reached saturation point and no significant new information is found (Afrizal, 2019). Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured approach to explore the experiences, perceptions, and meanings felt by informants regarding work pressure and entrepreneurial decisions. In-depth interviews were chosen because they allowed researchers to obtain rich, detailed, and in-depth data related to informants' subjective experiences (Wahyuni, 2014). Furthermore, limited observations were conducted to understand the context of informants' activities, both within the work environment and their entrepreneurial activities. Documentation was also used as supporting data in the form of notes, recordings, and other relevant information to strengthen the research findings.

Data analysis was conducted in stages using thematic analysis techniques, beginning with a data reduction process to select information relevant to the research focus. Next, coding was conducted to identify key themes related to work conflict, job insecurity, work stress, and entrepreneurship. These themes were then categorized and interpreted to understand the relationships between concepts and construct meaning from informants' experiences. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a systematic and in-depth descriptive narrative (Afrizal, 2019). To ensure data validity, this study employed source and technical triangulation techniques, comparing data from various informants and employing various data collection methods. Member checks were also conducted by requesting confirmation from informants regarding interview results, and an audit trail was compiled to ensure transparency in the research process (Afrizal, 2019). This study also addressed ethical aspects by ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and using data solely for academic purposes.

C. RESEARCH & DISCUSSION RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that Generation Z's experience of work stress is not only subjective but also strongly influenced by structural employment conditions. The integration of macroeconomic data and qualitative findings demonstrates a systematic link between labor market dynamics and individual psychological experiences. Thus, work stress cannot be understood solely as an individual phenomenon, but rather as a result of the interaction between structural context and personal experiences.

Based on data from the August 2025 National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas), the workforce was recorded at 3.08 million people, an increase of 68,960 people compared to the previous year. This increase indicates an expansion of the workforce, but not accompanied by a commensurate increase in job quality. This situation highlights the imbalance between job quantity and quality, which in the literature has been linked to increased perceptions of job insecurity (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Lu et al., 2023).

A total of 2.93 million people (95.1%) are employed. While quantitatively indicating a high absorption rate, this does not fully reflect adequate job quality. This is evident in the dominance of the informal sector at 56.39%, or approximately 1.65 million workers, indicating a high proportion of vulnerable employment, minimal protection, and low job security (Aulia et al., 2021; Febriyanti et al., 2024).

Table 1. Employment Conditions and Their Implications

No	Indicator	Value	Interpretation
1	Labor Force	3.08 million	Workforce expansion
2	Employed Population	2.93 million (95.1%)	High absorption but pseudo-employment
3	Informal Sector	56.39% (±1.65 million)	Dominance of vulnerable employment
4	Part-time Workers	+1.72 percentage points	Indication of underemployment
5	Underemployed	+0.14 percentage points	Low productivity

Source: Statistics Indonesia (2025), processed by the author

The data in Table 1 demonstrates an employment paradox: high employment absorption is not accompanied by adequate job quality. The increase in part-time and underemployed workers indicates underemployment, which has implications for income instability and reinforces perceptions of job insecurity. This finding aligns with the view that labor market instability is a primary determinant of job insecurity (De Cuyper et al., 2008). In terms of individual experiences, interview results indicate that work stress is initiated by work-life conflict, such as excessive workload, unrealistic demands, and an imbalance between work and personal life. These conflicts do not exist in isolation but interact with unstable work conditions, creating cumulative stress. This finding supports the work-life conflict theory, which states that role imbalance increases individual psychological distress (Allen et al., 2013).

Table 2. Interview Result Themes

No	Theme	Sub-Theme	Meaning
1	Work Conflict	Workload, work life imbalance	Initial trigger of pressure
2	Job Insecurity	Employment uncertainty	Future-related anxiety
3	Job Stress	Burnout, mental exhaustion	Accumulation of pressure
4	Career Reflection	Job evaluation	Turning point in decision-making
5	Decision	Entrepreneurship	Adaptive strategy

Source: Primary data, processed by researchers (2026)

The findings in Table 2 indicate that work stress is experienced in stages and is interconnected. Work conflict develops into job insecurity, which then culminates in work stress. Informants described stress as mental exhaustion, decreased motivation, and burnout, which aligns with the concept of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). However, this study uncovered a new dimension: that work stress is not only destructive but also serves as a point of reflection in career decision-making. Interestingly, under these stressful conditions,

Generation Z not only responded defensively but also demonstrated transformational tendencies by considering entrepreneurship as a career alternative. This suggests that work stress can trigger a process of reflection that leads to a change in career orientation.

Table 3. Generation Z Career Transformation Patterns

No	Condition	Impact
1	Work Conflict	Dissatisfaction
2	Job Insecurity	Anxiety
3	Job Stress	Burnout
4	Reflection	Career evaluation
5	Decision	Entrepreneurship

Source: Results of the researcher's thematic analysis (2026)

Table 3 shows that work pressure occurs progressively and systematically, forming a pattern of career transformation. This finding reinforces the notion that work pressure is cumulative, with each stage reinforcing the next, ultimately pushing individuals out of formal employment. From an entrepreneurial perspective, this finding reinforces the push factor approach, where individuals are driven to become entrepreneurs by the pressures they experience, not solely by opportunities (Korber & McNaughton, 2017). This expands the literature that has previously emphasized pull factors, such as motivation and business opportunities. Furthermore, Generation Z's tendency to shift to entrepreneurship is also linked to changing work values, such as a preference for flexibility, autonomy, and work-life balance. Phenomena such as quiet quitting reinforce the argument that formal employment is no longer the sole career orientation (Axios & Generation Lab, 2023). Thus, the results and discussion of this study confirm that work pressure not only has negative impacts but also serves as a catalyst for career transformation. In the context of an increasingly uncertain job market, entrepreneurship is a rational form of adaptation for Generation Z to achieve economic stability and independence.

Work Pressure and Career Transformation of Generation Z

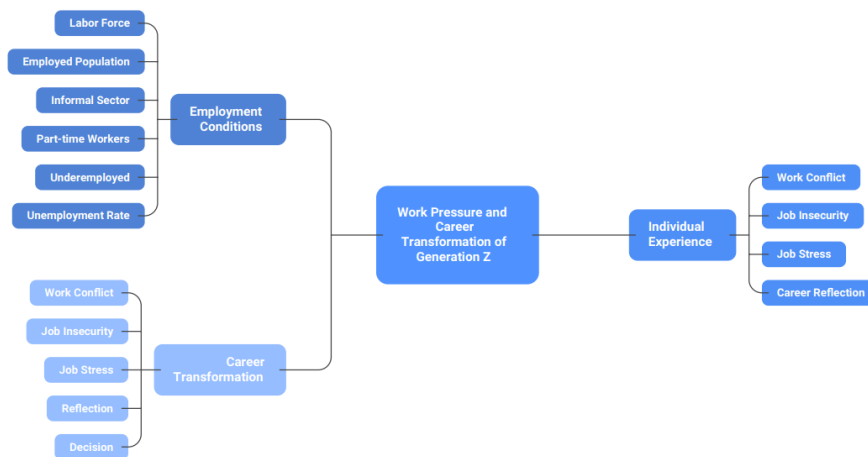


Figure 1. Integrative Model of Work Pressure and Career Transformation of Generation Z
Source: Researcher construction results (2026)

An Integrative Model of Work Pressure and Career Transformation. This integrative model is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between work pressure and career transformation in Generation Z. This model illustrates how structural factors of employment and individual experiences interact to shape the dynamics of work pressure, which ultimately drives changes in career orientation. The model in Figure 1 shows that work pressure in Generation Z is formed by the interaction between structural employment conditions and individual experiences. The dominance of the informal sector and increasing underemployment create job instability that reinforces job insecurity, which underlies work pressure. At the individual level, this pressure develops gradually through work conflict, job insecurity, and work stress. This process does not stop with negative impacts but continues into a phase of career reflection, which becomes a turning point in

decision-making. Furthermore, individuals tend to choose entrepreneurship as a career alternative that offers flexibility and autonomy. In this context, entrepreneurship is influenced not only by opportunities (pull factors) but also by work pressure as a motivating factor (push factors). The novelty of this model lies in the assertion that work pressure is not only destructive but also serves as a catalyst for career transformation toward entrepreneurship

D. CONCLUSION

This research confirms that work stress among Generation Z is not simply a consequence of unstable working conditions, but rather a structural mechanism that actively shapes the dynamics and direction of career transformation. In the context of an expanding labor market and changing work values, work stress emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon linking structural factors to individual responses.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates that work stress does not cease to be a negative experience, but develops into a reflective process that encourages individuals to rethink their career choices. These findings reveal that the interaction between job insecurity, role conflict, and work stress serves as a catalyst that directs Generation Z toward entrepreneurship as a form of adaptation strategy. Therefore, this research offers a new perspective by positioning work stress not merely as a source of problems but as a trigger for transformation that creates opportunities.:

1. Work Pressure as a Multidimensional Phenomenon

Work pressure among Generation Z emerges from the interaction between structural labor conditions and individual experiences. Empirical findings showing the dominance of informal employment and underemployment (BPS, 2025) reinforce the argument that job instability is a structural driver of job insecurity. This is consistent with the perspective of De Cuyper et al. (2008), which emphasizes that precarious employment significantly affects employee well-being. Furthermore, the shifting work values of Generation Z, which prioritize flexibility and extrinsic rewards (Twenge et al., 2010; Agarwal & Vaghela, 2018), intensify their sensitivity toward unstable work conditions.

2. The Progressive Dynamics of Work Pressure

The findings confirm that work pressure develops progressively through interconnected phases, including work–family conflict, job insecurity, and cumulative work stress. This aligns with Allen et al. (2000), who highlight the consequences of work–family conflict, and Harkness et al. (2005), who conceptualize work stress as a cumulative process. In addition, prolonged exposure to such conditions may lead to burnout, as conceptualized by Maslach and Leiter (2016). This indicates that work pressure is not a singular phenomenon but a dynamic and escalating process, affecting psychological well-being.

3. The Role of Career Reflection as a Turning Point

This study reveals that work pressure not only generates negative outcomes but also stimulates career reflection as a critical turning point. This finding extends the concept of quality of work life (Sirgy et al., 2001) and work–life balance (Kalliath & Brough, 2008), where individuals actively evaluate their work conditions and personal well-being. In this context, entrepreneurship emerges as a rational and adaptive response, supported by the concept of resilience in entrepreneurship (Korber & McNaughton, 2017), where individuals transform adversity into opportunity.

4. Work Pressure as a Catalyst for Career Transformation

This study confirms that work pressure functions both as a push factor and a catalyst for career transformation toward entrepreneurship. Empirical evidence supports prior studies linking job insecurity and turnover intention (Aulia et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2023; Febriyanti et al., 2024). However, this research contributes novelty by positioning work pressure not merely as a trigger for exit behavior, but as a

transformational mechanism leading to entrepreneurial pathways. This integrative perspective bridges organizational behavior and entrepreneurship literature, particularly in the context of Generation Z talent management (Vieira et al., 2024).

Suggestions:

1. **Policy Implications.** The government should not only focus on employment absorption but also on improving job quality. Policies aimed at reducing labor market precarity such as strengthening labor protection, minimizing informal sector dominance, and enhancing job security are essential to reduce job insecurity and improve worker well-being (De Cuyper et al., 2008; Grawitch et al., 2006).
2. **Organizational/Company Implications.** Organizations need to adopt adaptive work management strategies by promoting work flexibility, work–life balance, and employee well-being systems. These strategies are crucial in preventing work stress, burnout, and counterproductive work behaviors (Fan et al., 2023), while also enhancing employee engagement and empowerment (Fernandez & Moldogaziev, 2013).
3. **Implications for Entrepreneurship and Education.** Educational institutions should strengthen entrepreneurial ecosystems by fostering resilience, adaptive skills, and entrepreneurial mindset development. This is important to ensure that the transition toward entrepreneurship is intentional and opportunity-driven, rather than purely pressure-induced (Korber & McNaughton, 2017). Additionally, integrating digital literacy and social media awareness is relevant given its influence on Generation Z behavior (Jaiswal & Vidani, 2024).
4. **Recommendations for Future Research.** Future studies are recommended to apply quantitative or mixed method approaches to validate the integrative model proposed in this research (Wahyuni, 2014). Further exploration of moderating variables such as social support, financial literacy, mental well-being (Nabahani & Riyanto, 2020), and digital work culture phenomena like quiet quitting (Axios & Generation Lab, 2023; Biregeyi et al., 2023) is necessary to deepen understanding of career transformation dynamics among Generation Z.

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